Interview with Herman Rebhan

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HERMAN REBHAN

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Shea: Today is Tuesday, May 2, 1995. We are at the home of my old friend Herman Rebhan, whom I first met in Argentina about 30 years ago. Actually it's a crummy day out here on Montrose Road off of Wisconsin Avenue [in Rockville, Maryland]. Good afternoon, Herman.

Kienzle: Herman, would you like to begin by giving us your background, where you were born, etc.?

REBHAN: Yes. I was born in 1920 in what is today Poland, and I grew up in Cologne, Germany. I went to high school in Cologne and was a member of the Zionist Social Democratic Youth Organization, which gave me some ideas about justice and unions, etc. During the Hitler period, I was still going to school and arrived in this country luckily in 1938. This country opened the door for me, because otherwise I would have probably wound up in Auschwitz. I was 18 years old. We were lucky. The whole family came over [to the United States], and we went to Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1938 jobs were hard to get, but I got a job through a Jewish social service organization. I worked in a place that produced and printed envelops for big companies like Ohio Bell

Telephone, etc. I was in the country maybe eight months and I thought the conditions in the plant were pretty bad, and I thought of organizing a union. First I went down to the Typographical Union, and they nearly threw me out the door and said, “An unskilled worker coming to us highly skilled workers! Go some place else.” So I went down to the CIO office, and they received me. They said, “Well, Herman, why don't you get us some names?” [I asked], “How do I get names?” [They said], “Off the time cards.” The next thing I knew the company got wind of it and for the first time they called a meeting of everybody in the plant. There were about 250 people. This had never happened in the 30 years that the company had existed. There were three bosses in the company: one that ran the plant, and he was a miserable man. He would walk down the isle and turn around to see if a person was working. Then there was one who was the outside salesman, and one who ran the office. They called a meeting on company time. That was before the N.L.R.B. law was changed so that they could hold these meetings. The man from the office came out to talk to us. He had a written, prepared text, and he made a little speech. He said, “You know the company only made one half of one percent profit last year, but we gave our people back a five percent pay cut,” because shortly before the employees' pay was cut five percent. The [company] gave the workers a five percent pay cut in order buy new machinery. “Any questions?” We were sitting on piles of paper. “Any questions?” There was silence. I said, “I have a question.” We were making $12 a week. “I know what five percent is of $12, but one and a half percent of what? $100,000? $200,000? $300,000?” That was a lot of money in those days. Bedlam! The meeting broke up. And the next thing I was on the committee.

Kienzle: The organizing committee?

REBHAN: The Organizing Committee of the CIO of the Paper Workers Union. So the next thing the CIO organizer took us down to the National Labor Relations Board in the NBC Building on Superior Avenue in Cleveland, and we talked to an agent of the Board. You [must remember] how pro-labor the Board was. You know, my English wasn't very good yet, but I caught on very quickly in languages. The Board member said, “Didn't the boss

say that?" "Yes, yes, yes. He did say that." The next thing I knew we had a "cease and desist" order put on the bulletin board, and we had a union. Six months later I was going to New York to a convention of the Paper Workers Union.

Shea: Did you have an election?

REBHAN: Yes, we had an election.

Kienzle: Were you an officer of the union.

REBHAN: Yes, I was on the committee. It was an amalgamated local. The next thing I knew I was a delegate to the Paper Workers Convention. I remember Emil Rieve speaking and [Allen Hayward], who was CIO Executive Vice President. He came from the Mine Workers Union. A little fellow. He made good speeches. That's how I started. He ran against [Walter] Reuther in the Convention in Atlantic City when Phillip Murray died.

Then my dad had problems getting a job in Cleveland. He had a friend in Chicago and got a job in Chicago. We all moved to Chicago. That was around 1940. In the meantime I had a girlfriend in Cleveland. I met my wife at night school learning English. We got married in 1941.

In Chicago I worked in a number of jobs. I worked in another printing place, which was union. I was a member of the Lithographers Union. I was a feeder on a big press. We made fairly decent money there. Then the war came on, and I went to work at the Dodge Plant of the Chrysler Corporation in Chicago. I joined the United Automobile Workers Union (UAW) Local 274.

Kienzle: When was that?

REBHAN: That was probably in 1942. It was a brand new plant, and I got active in the union. I was a steward. We had to collect dues in those days and it was hectic. I was new to this country, so I was very cautious. A nice story is that my mother went to work during

the war in a clothing place sewing uniforms. One day I came home, and she was furious. I said, “What happened?” She said, “Oh, the boss!” With all her broken English, she became the piece work steward in the plant and had to argue with the boss about piece work prices. Then she told me, “Now I understand why you do these things!” because she was always worried [and saying], “You'll make trouble. You'll get deported.”Kienzle: Had your father been active in the trade union movement?

REBHAN: No, my father wasn't active in the trade union movement. During the Depression my father went to Belgium one time to work on structural steel just to make a living. You know the Depression was all over the world. He couldn't stay there because he didn't have a work permit. Then he developed a small coal business. Cologne has a kind of brown coal. It's not mined in deep mines. It's mined in open mines. He developed a little business of delivering coal. We had a horse and a wagon. That was it.

So, I got active in the union, and then when Chrysler shut down, because the war was ending, I went to work at Electromotive. My wife Dorothy already worked at Electromotive at that time. That was in 1945. Then in November of 1945 we went on strike, and the strike lasted for 120 days. I was active around the union. In the meantime, I found a part time job, because somebody had to work. Dorothy quit and got herself a full time job. My real activity in the union came [when] I became a member of the Reuther caucus, because I was an anti-Communist. I knew what the Communist Party did in Germany, and I knew a little bit about the Soviet Union, and the role of the Soviet Union in the Stalin-Hitler Pact, etc. I became active in the union and really rose when we had the big fight in the UAW over the affiliation of the Farm Equipment Workers. That was in 1946 or 1947. Reuther had been elected president of the UAW by forty votes. He had beaten R. J. Thomas.
In those days we had annual conventions, so right away politics started for the next convention. Well, the Communists were quite strong in our local at that time. They were a bunch of college boys, who came and worked during the war in the plant. The Communists developed a technique. They said, “We will merge with the Farm Equipment Workers. This will give us the balance of power, and we will defeat Reuther at the next convention.”

Well, Reuther, when he was elected president, had a minority on the Executive Board. He didn't have a majority. So this question of whether the Farm Equipment Workers should be affiliated came up and there was a big fight over it. Finally we voted to have a referendum on this question. The referendum was not a referendum as you understand it,[i.e.] that every member has one vote. The referendum was by local union. The local union held a membership meeting and the vote of the membership meeting decided the total vote of the local.

Kienzle: Weighted according to membership?

REBHAN: According to membership. It was in the month of July or August. It was tough to get members out to a meeting on Sunday. Both sides worked hard to get members out to a the meeting. I remember I prepared a little speech for the meeting. Jack Conway, who was then Reuther's Administrative Assistant and sort of in charge of the politics and who also came from our region out of Local 6 in Chicago, came to our meeting. [Also] there were a representative of the Regional Director, who was on the opposite side of Reuther in our region — He was the assistant and a good speaker, Paul Russo — and the representative who used to service our local, Larry Carlstrom, who was very much liked by our local, because he was an intelligent guy and very good on grievances, etc.

Conway came to me and said, “Herman, who is going to speak for our side?” I said, “Well, I prepared a little speech, but I don't know about the rest.” I wasn't really in with the clique in those days yet. So the speeches started. Conway spoke, and he was nervous. The sweat was running down his sleeves. It was hot, and in those days the halls weren't air-conditioned, at least not all of them. Then I got the floor, and I must have had a pretty good speech. I talked about [the proposal for affiliation] being done behind the president's back and unconstitutional. I said, “Well, what are we going to get from the Farm Equipment Workers. We have to give jobs to these pork-choppers,” because the agreement was that all full time officials were supposed to get union jobs. I said, “We take over their debts and their lousy contracts and so on.” The vote went my way against affiliation.

A few weeks later Walter Reuther called a caucus meeting in Rockford, Illinois, which is about 100 miles south of Chicago. And Boy! They introduced me to Reuther and he patted me on the head. “A good little boy! What a fine speech you made, Herman.” The next thing I knew, I was on the Executive Board of the local union. [They pro-Reuther forces] put me on the slate and I got elected. Well, when I got on the Executive Board, there were more things to do. Then two years later. . . — We had two year terms. — I was elected recording secretary of the local, and I became editor of the paper. A guy who didn't know any English they made editor of the paper! I changed the paper completely. I put out a pretty good paper. I got some advice from people who know something about how [to do] the layout. In most union papers the layout is black and white with the galleys straight down; I put pictures in and the paper became sort of my vehicle. Then we had a fight in our local with Greathouse [over his candidacy] for Regional Director. It was a stupid fight. We were greenhorns, so we lost that fight. Greathouse went after us to defeat us, but he didn't succeed. We made peace with him at the next conventions, and he was elected unanimously.

Then an opening for Vice President in the UAW came along, and Greathouse was picked to be elected to be Vice President. There was an opening for Regional Director in the region, and a campaign started. We were one of the largest locals in the region at that time. Jack Conway wanted to be a candidate, but Greathouse didn't want Conway, so he picked as his candidate Pete Watson, an old time UAW Representative supported by a majority on the Regional staff. Conway's candidacy could not be ignored and Watson was not a candidate looked upon favorably by Reuther and some key locals in the Region, mainly in Iowa. Greathouse dropped his support of Watson and picked Robert Johnson from Iowa as his candidate providing Conway withdrew, which he did. However, Watson remained as a candidate and the Region was split.

The campaign began. Both candidates, Watson and Johnson, were Reuther supporters. They all came to our local, [and said], “Herman, you've got to get on the bandwagon.” I

said, “We don't want a fight this time. We'll sit this one out and let you guys fight over it.” “Oh, you can't sit this one out. You can't do this.” So finally Greathouse came to our local and talked to us. I was chairman of the bargaining committee at that time. The president of my local said, “What about some sort of a job for Herman?” and Greathouse said, “Well, we can work that out.” He was a smart politician and a very smart guy.

Then the question came up about these candidates and one problem we had was with the Caterpillar Local, which had 14,000 members or even more at that time. They were anti-Reuther administration. The anti-administration [forces] had three-quarters of the delegates and the pro-administration [forces] about a quarter. Because the race was very tight, the question was: What do we in the local union do with this? Well, I had an idea. In the UAW the Reuther caucus had this tradition that we vote in caucus, and this becomes the policy for the official vote. I told Greathouse, “Look, we'll have a caucus of Reuther supporters and since these delegates from Caterpillar are not members of our caucus because they are anti-administration, they don't vote in our caucus. So if we vote a majority in our caucus, we got it.” That didn't go over with him very well.

Then [Walter] Reuther called a meeting in Detroit of both sides, Watson and Johnson supporters. We were in the reception room of his office, and Frazier, who was an administrative assistant to Reuther at that time, came to me and said, “What do we do, Herman, about this?” I said, “Well, I have been trying to tell Greathouse and some other people that. . . “ and I gave him the same story. He said, “I'll talk to Walter and we'll see.” Well, we got to Walter's office. We sat around there. It was a big office. And Walter in his usual way starts with job number one, giving us the history of the factional fights in the UAW and how we have to have unity. This was a family fight and we shouldn't have any outsiders determining policy. Then he said, “I have a suggestion.” And he suggested exactly what I had said, and the president of my local, who was sitting next to me, kicked me on the shins and said, “Listen. . .” And I said, “Keep quiet.” The Watson supporters didn't realize what had happened to them. Once they made a commitment, they were stuck with it. When they got home, they realized what had happened, but it was too late.

We had a meeting of the delegates from our region to vote for a new regional director and Robert Johnson got elected by seven votes. That's how close it was. The next thing I knew, I was on the staff of the UAW servicing local unions. I did a lot of other things. I worked on political action. I worked on publicity. I got on the UAW staff in 1956. I did the usual work and I was sort of a special assistant to the regional director. Because nobody got fired, it was like a civil service in the UAW. When you lose the election, nobody gets fired anymore. Johnson coopted most of the staff members, and he ran a pretty good region.

Then in 1960 Kennedy ran for President, and we worked pretty hard for Kennedy. We also had a gubernatorial election. Kerner ran for governor. The UAW was a little bit split in the primary. There was a little split in the labor movement, but we supported Kerner. After Kerner got elected, Kerner asked the regional director to become Director of Labor for the State of Illinois. Well, there was a big discussion in the UAW whether he should take it or not [or whether] he should take it on a temporary basis of six to eight months. Then the next thing I knew, he said, “Herman, you come with me to the Illinois Department of Labor as my administrative assistant.” So that is how I got to the Illinois Department of Labor. It was a great idea and a completely different field of work.

The first thing I did was to reorganize the Safety Department, [which had] the factory inspectors. I got somebody down from the U.S. Labor Department in Washington and somebody from the UAW in Detroit, and I ran courses at the University of Illinois for these guys. I increased their expense money. I remember the first day I was at the Department of Labor. The factory inspectors had to check in and some of these guys were patronage people. They didn't give a damn about safety. They didn't know anything about safety. They were cronies of the ward committeemen [who had been given] jobs. Many were Republicans. I fired about 30 Republicans on the first day I was there, and then the screaming started! The state representatives called up. “Oh, that's my guy. You can't do this to me!” I found a lot of [corruption]. You know, the Republican administration was a corrupt administration. For example, [there was] a lawyer [who worked] out of an office on

La Salle Street. It took me about two weeks to trace this guy. He was on the payroll being paid as a factory inspector. So I finally called him and said, “You're fired.” He said, “Oh, it took you a little while.” It was amazing!

But there were also a number of good guys. There was a fellow from the Steelworkers Union, who lost in an internal fight in the Steelworkers. They got him a job on the state payroll as a factory inspector. He was a very good man, and I made him chief of the inspectors, and we began to function. When questions came up about a construction accident, the inspectors were out there if I had to call them in the middle of the night at home to get them there. We made an impression. I remember Kerner having a meeting with Reuther one time, and Kerner had good plans. He was a good man. He just got screwed by guys who were his close friends.

Shea: Was his [first] name Otto?

REBHAN: Otto Kerner. He was the son-in law of Anthony Cermak. He married Cermak's daughter.

Shea: Was Cermak the one who was assassinated. . .

REBHAN: He was assassinated [while] with Roosevelt in Florida.

Kienzle: Sorry, who was Cermak?

REBHAN: Cermak was Mayor of Chicago. He and Roosevelt were at a meeting in Florida sometime [in 1932-1933] and an assassination attempt was made on Roosevelt and Cermak was killed.

Kerner was a very good man in many other ways. He later headed the Kerner Commission on violence [in the cities]. Things that the experts wrote on that commission are still used today. I remember he had grand plans to do things, and Reuther told him. “Look, you don't need all these details. Put the structural steel on first, and then we'll put the bricks in later.”

You know what reminded me of it was when [President] Clinton had his health insurance plan. He had all the details in it, which the opposition could shoot at and kill it. I never forgot what Reuther said. “Put up the steel and then we do [the rest later].” That's how he handled negotiations, too. He never went in there and said that we have to get A, B, C, and D. He said that we have to get justice and equity and that we have to do this and this. And the companies had to work on it.

Then I came back to the UAW. During my time in the UAW, how did I get into this international racket? During that period when I was in the local union, we used to get visitors under the Marshall Plan. [They were] exchange people coming here.

Kienzle: This would have been in 1958 and 1959?

REBHAN: Yes, 1958 -1959, and even before that when I was still in the plant in 1950-51. So we [hosted] Germans. When a group of German trade unionists came, Victor Reuther used to call up the regional director and say, “Herman [can] take care of them.” So I became a foreign expert. I was always interested in international affairs, being somebody from Europe and having some social democratic ideas, etc. The UAW was always active in the international field in the International Metalworkers Federation, and also in the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions). Victor was once the representative of the C.I.O. in Paris for a while, and I knew Victor through conventions, etc. So one day Victor called me up and said, “Would you like to go to Geneva for a couple of years?” I said, “Well, Victor, you had better talk to the Regional Director first. You know what protocol is.” So he said, “Yes, I already talked to him about it.” I said, “What kind of job is this?” “Well, come to Washington and I'll explain it.” I came to Washington and he explained it to me. It was this job that the UAW was able to establish in the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) to create multilateral councils. The first council was in the auto industry. The agreement was that somebody from the UAW would head this. So Victor explained the job to me, [which required that I] go to Geneva [and take] the kids, and so on. I said, “Wait a minute. I have to go home and have a little council of war [with

my family] and discuss it. So we sat down with the kids. I don't remember how old they were. Jim was about 16 or 17 and Gail about 13. They didn't want to go. Their friends [were here]. And Dorothy said, “If we don't go now, the next time we get a chance, we will be too old to walk. We'd better do it.”

Kienzle: What year was this?

REBHAN: This was in 1966. The discussion started in 1965. So I was given the job. The kids had to finish school, so for a time I worked on this job in Detroit. There was a little dispute over that job.

Kienzle: The job was?

REBHAN: The job was with the International Metalworkers Federation in Geneva, and my title was the Coordinator of World Auto Councils.

Kienzle: I was wondering about your job in Detroit?

REBHAN: The job in Detroit was sort of preliminary, because we couldn't leave. The kids had to finish school and so on, so they said, “Why don't you work in Detroit for a while. Get acquainted and so on.”

There was a big dispute about it. You know, I'm the kind of guy who doesn't sit still. I've got to be active. Some people in the IMF got a little worried about this, and said, “No, no, no. This isn't what we agreed to.” [To Jim Shea] Your friend Benedict was one of those.

Kienzle: Would you explain who Benedict was?

REBHAN: Dan Benedict was an Assistant General Secretary in the IMF. He came originally — at least he says so — from the IUE, the Electrical Workers Union. He was stationed in Geneva. He worked overseas for a long time. He worked for CARE at one time, etc. and he worked for Victor [Reuther] in Paris at one time.

Shea: He worked for ORIT, too. Didn't he?

REBHAN: For ORIT in Mexico. That's right. He ran for General Secretary of ORIT and Hourige beat him. So he said, “Oh, no, no. We wanted Herman to coordinate from here.” Victor said, “No, no. That wasn't our agreement.”

Kienzle: Coordinate from here meaning from Geneva? REBHAN: From Detroit. So Victor said, “No, no. That wasn't our understanding. You had better tell Graedel, who was then General Secretary of the IMF, “either that or we are going to do it on our own.” In the UAW, we did everything on our own. So Victor said to me, “ The next thing you know Graedel will be on the phone to Walter.” And sure enough, Graedel called Walter. He wanted to have a meeting, and Victor said, “You go to the meeting.” I said, “I'm not going to the meeting. I'm going to be working for Graedel in Geneva. Walter is going to read the riot act to him, and I don't want to be there. It will just embarrass the man. I'm going to work with him.” Sure enough. After everything was said, they wanted me right away. Nothing doing. I went there in the summer of 1966. Our son went off to the University of Chicago, and our daughter went with us to Geneva. Immediately I made a little tour to Latin America. [To Jim Shea] I think that's when I met you.

Shea: That's right. In Argentina.

REBHAN: In Argentina. I went to Latin America, because I wanted to get to know the people and the industry. I became very friendly with the Germans, because I spoke German. Otto Brenner was President of I. G. Metall. They were very suspicious of these auto councils, because they thought that the UAW was trying to split their union. Theirs was a general union. It had everything, the entire metal industry. And the UAW was going to take auto workers out of the union.

Kienzle: This was the German Metal Workers Union.

REBHAN: The German Metal Workers Union, I. G. Metall. Otto Brenner especially was worried about that. That was a foolish worry because to split the I. G. Metall would have been quite a task, but he was so careful. For instance, we had a mailing list to whom we would write on certain things, but to the Germans whether you wrote on Volkswagen or General Motors or Ford, every letter went to Otto Brenner. Everything was centralized. In all the other [countries], you had [various] persons. Then I organized a Volkswagen meeting in Wolfsburg, and the Germans were very happy with that meeting.

I had agreed to stay two years, and when the time came to go back, they had to look for somebody to replace me.

Kienzle: This would have been 1968?

REBHAN: 1968. So I stayed six months longer, and they replaced me with Burton Bendiner from the UAW Research Department. He went to Geneva. When I came back, there were [a number of] job openings for me. Two vice president wanted me to work for them. Victor [Reuther] called me up and he said, “Look, Herman. Don't make any commitment. Come to Detroit and talk to Walter [Reuther] about this.” I came to Detroit and I went into Walter's office and I said to Walter, “Before you start any discussion, where do you want me to work? That's where I am going to wind up working, because I am not going to convince you otherwise and there's no sense in being [coy].” He was shocked when I told him that. He thought he was going to have [to give] a long spiel to convince me. He said, “We want you to work as my administrative assistant in Washington, but come back here tomorrow. I'm going to have [Irving] Bluestone and Victor [Reuther] here, and we will work this thing out.” I said, “Walter, I'm not here for a vacation. I have things to do. I can't just hang around here.” He said, “Don't worry!” So the next day or the day after, I said, “I have to go to Washington now.” So we worked out [the job arrangement] and I became the Assistant Director of the International Affairs Department in Washington

and also an administrative assistant to Walter Reuther, which is the highest classification before an elected officer.

Kienzle: Who was the head of the International Department?

REBHAN: Victor [Reuther] was head of the International Department of the UAW. The UAW played a big role. We had a big International Affairs Department, and we did a lot of things. Ed Torres, is now a Congressman from California, worked in the Department.

Shea: I think when you came to Argentina, Ed Torres was [with you].

REBHAN: He came with me. [To Shea] Boy! You have a fabulous memory! I worked there [in the UAW International Affairs Department] from 1969 to 1974. In the meantime Walter Reuther was killed in an airplane accident, and Victor [Reuther], for personal reasons, took retirement. He actually couldn't get along with [Leonard] Woodcock and Woodcock became president. I remember one day Woodcock and I were traveling [together] on the same plane; he was traveling to Detroit, and I was going up to Black Lake. He said, “Herman, do you have a candidate for Director of the International Affairs Department?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Who's your candidate?” I said, “I am.” He said, “Okay. I don't have to worry about you. You are never going to try to screw me. All I want is for you to keep me informed.” He was a very good president. He's a very smart guy, and he understood politics and so on.

Shea: He went out as our ambassador to China.

REBHAN: Yes, to China. I went up there [to Detroit] twice a month, sat down with him, and talked about all the things that were happening in international affairs. He was very good about it, and he caught on quickly. Ivar Noren, who was a Swede, was General Secretary of the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) at that time. Ivar Noren was going to retire, and the question came up of electing a new General Secretary. Benedict was a candidate, who thought [the position] was owed to him because he was there

for such a long time, and Werner Thonnison was the other candidate. Thonnison came from I. G. Metall. He was I. G. Metall's public relations man at one time, and he worked as an Assistant General Secretary in the IMF. In the meantime, Otto Brenner had died and Eugen Loderer became President ofI. G. Metall. I knew Eugen Loderer, because by that time I was a member of the Executive Committee of the IMF and used to go to the Executive Committee meetings. There was a temporary President of the IMF, Rasmussen, who was from Denmark. The IMF was going to elect a President and Loderer got elected as President. The question came up of a General Secretary.

Kienzle: This was 1974?

REBHAN: It was 1974. One day I got a call from Loderer's assistant, who said, “Herman, why don't the Americans put up a candidate for General Secretary? You! You know German. You know Europe.” I said, “Wait a minute! Hold on! Hold your horses. First of all, I have to talk to the president of my union about it; and secondly, I have to talk to the other members of the IMF from the United States,” because the UAW wasn't a member of the AFL-CIO at that time. It was outside of the AFL-CIO. I said, “That's another problem. And then I have to talk to my family.”

Kienzle: What about Dan Benedict?

REBHAN: Dan Benedict was a candidate. He was campaigning already. He was from the IUE, the Electrical Workers Union. I don't want to say anything bad about him, but his IUE membership was [questionable]. I think he worked on vacation at a General Electric Plant.

Shea: He alleged that he worked at a GE plant in Lynn, Massachusetts.

REBHAN: He was up there as a student or something, but that's all right. It doesn't matter. He knew umpteen languages and he thought [the job as IMF Secretary General] was his. After these [I. G. Metall] guys called me from Germany, I called Woodcock at home, and he said, “You didn't say no?” I said, “I haven't said anything, Leonard. I was going

to talk to you first." He said, "Don't you say no to anybody. We're going to talk about it." Then Loderer made a tour of the U.S.A. Loderer took this thing seriously. He said he was coming to the United States to talk to the American affiliates over the question of a general secretary. He came to the United States with his administrative assistant and had meetings with the U.S. affiliates of the IMF. He had a meeting first in Washington with all the international representatives [including] Rudy Faupl, Meir Bernstein, Joe Keenan, and others.

Shea: Was Ben Sharman there?

REBHAN: No. Rudy Faupl was. Ben Sharman was just another guy in their department. Joe Keenan [was there]. And who else? A few others. They agreed: Yes, they were in favor of me being a candidate except the representative of the IUE.

Kienzle: What union was Joe Keenan from?

REBHAN: From the IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers]. In the old days, Joe used to come to every IMF Executive Committee meeting. He was good. He knew his stuff.

Shea: A Chicagoan.

REBHAN: A Chicagoan, and he never lost that Chicago touch. Then Loderer went to Pittsburgh and saw Abel [of the Steelworkers Union]. They were in favor. Then we went to see the UAW in Detroit. There happened to be a board meeting at the same time, and Loderer spoke to the entire board, and of course they were in favor of [my candidacy]. Then I went to see Kirkland. I said to Kirkland, "Look. I am being proposed for General Secretary. We are not members of the AFL-CIO, and you guys may have some objections to it." He said, "No, no. You're okay with us. We've had discussions."

Shea: He was Secretary-Treasurer [of the AFL-CIO at that time].

REBHAN: Yes. We knew it was okay, because while Loderer was in Washington, Meany gave a lunch for him with some key people. So the “blessing” was there. Then the campaign started, and it was a little bit of a dirty campaign. They accused me of being a stooge of Lovestone and the Central Intelligence Agency, but if you grew up in the UAW, you knew how to play politics, because you got that with your “mother's milk.” There is never a fight in international organizations; it is all by consent. So I thought to myself, guys like my opponent I ate for breakfast in the UAW. In the UAW local unions there were factional fights all the time. So the first thing I did was to send a letter saying that some little paper which [represented] a faction in the AEU. . . — It was a little left-wing paper. — had carried this article about me being a stooge of Lovestone and the CIA, etc. So I sent out a letter with a translation in IMF official languages of this little sheet, and I said, “The campaign hasn't even started yet and the dirt is already flying. You know the UAW. You know our positions. You know me.” That hit them right in the eyes. They didn't know what to do with it. It was a nice polite letter to every affiliate of the IMF.

Kienzle: How many affiliates were there at that time?

REBHAN: About the 150 affiliates in about 70 different countries. But the votes were the Germans, the Americans, and the Japanese [affiliates]. If you started with them, everything else was gravy.

Kienzle: How many members did the affiliates represent?

REBHAN: The IMF at that time had about 12 million members.

Kienzle: And the three countries you mentioned represented how many?

REBHAN: Three million in Germany, two and a half million in Japan, and about three million here in the United States.

Kienzle: So the overwhelming majority came from those three countries.

REBHAN: Yes, the overwhelming majority. But the pressure was on. Thonnison withdrew. There's an unwritten rule in the IMF that the President and the General Secretary cannot be from the same country. Loderer was President and from I. G. Metall, Germany, and Thonnison was from the same union and the same country. Then Benedict became the [opposition] candidate, and it was a dirty campaign in a way. “The Americans are trying to take over.” The IMF congress in 1974 was in Stockholm. Some people didn't know me, and they started looking. “Who's this guy, Rebhan?” The Swedish press got involved with articles all over. The Swedes didn't think that a guy from a big country should get [the Secretary Generalship]. Benedict played around and all these little countries supported him, etc. Then the vote came, and the question [arose] of whether I should speak at the congress. I said, “Look, I'm going to speak at the congress during the debate.” I had prepared a good speech, and it was well received.

Kienzle: This was before the vote?

REBHAN: Before the vote during the regular debate. I changed this procedure.

Kienzle: How was your standing with the Japanese?

REBHAN: The Japanese were for me, and the pressure on the Japanese was something terrible. Mayata, who was head of the Japanese delegation and who was President of the Steelworkers Union in Japan, came and he said to me and Loderer, “Look, if this pressure continues on my delegation, we're walking out and we're only coming back to vote.” That quieted things down. Then the vote came and the pressure was on again. I won by a two to one [margin].

Kienzle: Eight million to four million.

REBHAN: Something like that. I don't have the figures anymore. Then I went back to the United States, and I was planning to assume the job sometime in the fall. I had to sell the house and get ready to go. Right away I wrote to everybody who had any position in the

IMF to send me a list of what kind of work they did. Some people were really worried about what I was going to do. I did make changes. I decentralized things to give people more responsibility. I reorganized different departments. I traveled to Latin America, because they were all against me at that time. They [had supported] Benedict, and Benedict was their great hero.

Shea: I was in Brazil at that time

REBHAN: I visited Brazil.

Kienzle: Could you tell us why Benedict had a strong following in Latin America?

REBHAN: First of all, he spoke good Spanish and Portuguese and Italian, and he spent a lot of time there. Although we didn't have many dues-paying members there or members in general, we spent a lot of money there.

Shea: I think he carried a lot of those Latin American affiliates.

REBHAN: He paid attention to them, and he sent them to conferences with the IMF paying and all those things.

Shea: I think he forgave a lot of the dues.

REBHAN: Yes, well, we never collected anything from them.

Kienzle: By “carry” you mean that he subsidized them?

REBHAN: We always paid things. There was nothing wrong with that. If people don't have any money, you've got to support them. But it was done [by Benedict] on the basis that “I am the jefe (chief)!” It was done the Latin American way. Maybe it was necessary to do that. I don't know. But it was done that way, and some of these people were very good

people and sacrificed plenty and suffered plenty and deserved everything they got. But Latin America wasn't the only thing. We had other places to go.

The first thing I did was to organize our Central Committee meetings differently. The Central Committee meeting had always been a “nuts and bolts” meeting. Who cares about that? These delegates didn't come there from far away to listen to what we spent on paperclips and things of that nature. They wanted to have something [substantive], so the first Central Committee [meeting] I organized was in Japan. And the Japanese were in seventh heaven; they had never before had a Central Committee meeting there. They went out of their way; they did it up right. What I did was I said, “The first day we will discuss business. The second day we'll have an educational program. We'll discuss politics, economics, etc.” So I invited one of the left-wing Labor Party M.P. from Britain to speak. He was going to be in Japan. We also invited a Japanese economist and another economist from the United States. We had a discussion for three-quarters of a day, and the delegates loved it. Since then we've always had a discussion program on the second day on some subject.

Kienzle: On political issues?

REBHAN: Political issues. That [is still the practice] in the IMF. That made the meetings more interesting and more worthwhile, and we moved the Central Committee meetings around. We didn't have them just in Geneva, because people got tired of coming to Geneva, especially in the fall when it usually rained. We had them in various countries and the meeting gave prestige to the country and to the union. I also moved the Executive Committee meetings around to different places. When the Executive Committee meeting [was held] in a small country, we would meet with the prime minister and with the labor party people. That gives the local organization some prestige.

Then let me just mention some other things: We reorganized our publications. Then at that time Franco was still running Spain. The IMF had a very good tradition about Spain.

The IMF supported the Spanish workers during the darkest days of Franco. We supported people in exile, and we supported people in the underground.

Kienzle: This was financial support? Communications?

REBHAN: Financial support, communications, and if they were in jail, support for the family and things like that. The Germans were very good on this question, because they had conscience pains because of what Hitler did to Spain. Then I started going to Spain. Spain was wide open at that time, and there was no problem [entering]. Meetings were held with the UGT [General Workers Union] in churches. The only thing you had to watch was when you left not to leave all at once, [i.e.], to leave in small groups. Policemen were around. I spoke to UGT congresses being held quietly. We spent a lot of money and a lot of effort in Spain.

Shea: You knew Redondo then? REBHAN: Oh, sure. Redondo and all those people. We bought them mimeograph machines and copying machines and other equipment. They did a very smart thing. Felipe Gonzalez developed lawyers' offices to take care of workers' problems like unemployment compensation, accidents and so on. They were basically fronts for the union. We gave them money to run these offices. So this was very good.

Kienzle: In which cities were they located?

REBHAN: They were located in the Basque country. They were located in Barcelona and in Madrid of course. And Seville. It was illegal, but Franco was dying and everything was changing. These were some of the highlights that were great.

Kienzle: This would have been in the middle 1970s.

REBHAN: Yes, 1975 and 1976. Then Portugal came shortly after that. I remember that Woodcock was very good about this. He came personally to Spain to all these big meetings and traveled. He went to Portugal. We gave a lot of money to Mario Soares, the

socialist [leader]. A little episode: The [American] Labor Attach# was Dale Povenmire, and Carlucci was the [American] Ambassador at the time. Woodcock and I had a meeting with Carlucci and Povenmire, and Carlucci said, “Mr. Woodcock, I'm having a big argument with Kissinger. Kissinger doesn't want to do anything for Mario Soares. He thinks that the socialists are going to lose. Mr. Woodcock, the best thing you can do is to raise as much money as you can for the Socialist Party because that is the only game in town.” Then we met with Mario Soares, and he said, “Kissinger called me the 'Kerensky of Portugal.' “ Later, after Mario Soares won the election, we saw Mario Soares again and he said, “Kissinger apologized to me.” And that was unusual thing for Kissinger. Woodcock personally went out and hit up the rich IMF affiliates to get money for Mario Soares.

Then the other highlight was South Africa.

Shea: You had Felipe Gonzalez elected in Spain.

REBHAN: No, he lost the first election and nearly had a nervous breakdown. They couldn't find him for three days. You know how we knew that? We scheduled a meeting of our Executive Committee for right after the election, because we thought this was going to be a big thing. So we had the Executive Committee meeting, and Felipe was going to talk to our Executive Committee members, and we couldn't find him. Finally he showed up, and he made a good speech, but he was very upset that he had lost the first election. He thought he was going to win that one.

Then we had South Africa. In South Africa we were active for a long time with the “colored” workers. Actually there was an Auto Workers Union. It was in Port Elizabeth mainly because Ford, Volkswagen, and the auto industry were concentrated there. We supported them, and I remember that while I was still in the UAW, we brought a guy from Port Elizabeth who was General Secretary of the union to the United States. When he came to Washington. . . — I think the Labor Department brought him. — I asked him, “Who do you want see? The Council of Churches?” He said, “Hell, no. I want to go back and be an

officer of my union. If I see the Council of Churches, I'll never see South Africa again." I said [to myself], "That guy is smart."

Kienzle: Why would he not see South Africa again if he went?

REBHAN: Because they probably would have arrested him. To the South Africans, the Council of Churches and groups like that were subversive organizations. He wanted to see only trade unionists, and he was smart. I have to hand it to him. His stock with me went up when he said that.

And we also dealt with some "black" unions, but they were not legitimate.

Kienzle: Did you have "white" affiliates as well?

REBHAN: Yes, we also had "white" affiliates. Some of the "white" affiliates were pretty good and had "colored" unions as auxiliary unions on the side, which was one of the legal ways to operate, and some of them really were mainly white racists.

Kienzle: Did they object to your dealing with "colored" and "black" unions?

REBHAN: They didn't object, but they were very uncomfortable with some of these things. They also wanted to have these auxiliary unions because it [meant] dues and so on for them, and they didn't want them to push for independence. Later we finally expelled a couple of "white unions" actually from the IMF.

Kienzle: But they had no veto power over your policies generally?

REBHAN: No. We tried to establish a council. Those [arrangements] were always difficult, because the whites were more aggressive because they could get things done with the government and with the Labor Department and so on. So I applied for a visa for South Africa and I was turned down. I think I was turned down twice. Then the South African Government and the German companies wanted Loderer to go to South Africa, because

German companies like Siemens were big there. Volkswagen had a big plant. Loderer said, “Yes, I will go to South Africa provided Herman gets a visa.” They horsed around with that for a little while and I got a visa.” He was good.

Kienzle: Did you accompany Loderer?

REBHAN: Yes, I went there [with him]. This was a great trip. We went to South Africa, and we started talking to our affiliates. We went to see Volkswagen, which actually was not bad in South Africa. Volkswagen trained black workers, gave them some benefits, and gave them language training so they would understand English instead of just the native languages. The [employers] had an organization, the Metal Employers Association. Then Brian Fredericks, one of our “colored” guys, traveled with us. He was a organizer for the Auto Workers Union. To us we don't know the difference between “colored' and “black.” We went over to the office of the Employers' Association and we met the head of the Employers' Association, Dr. something. . . — I don't recall his name. South Africa is like Germany. Everybody has a doctor's title. — said, “Oh, yes. We are going to have lunch at the Rhodes Club. My Executive Committee is over there. But Mr. Rebhan, I have to tell you, we turned in all the names of the people, and the 'colored' guy is not on the list.” I said, “Well, that's too bad, but he's going with us wherever we go. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll get a room in a big hotel, and I'll pay for the lunch. Don't worry about. We'll meet in a big hotel if we can't meet there [at the Rhodes Club.” I knew it wasn't a question of a “colored” man going to the meeting; it was a question of this guy going to the Rhodes Club. He said, “Just a minute. I'll make a telephone call.” He came back and he was sweating. He was caught in between. He never expected that. He went back into the other office and made another phone call. After a few minutes he returned and with a sigh of relief said, “Everything is okay.”

We went into the Rhodes Club and through the front door and there was a black elevator operator. I thought he was going to faint when he saw this black man walk in through the front door. [Here to fore] black men only shined shoes or walked through the back

door. It was a great thing. [The West German weekly magazine] Der Spiegel wrote about Loderer's trip to South Africa, and they wrote this up in a special box. We broke the color line at the Rhodes Club. The Rhodes Club existed over hundred years or something like that.

South African workers began to gather strength through their unions and began flexing their muscles. The results were a number of strikes. Each strike had its own dynamics. Let me just deal with two strikes, one against a South African company owned by Anglo-American, the Oppenheimer family trust, and the other one owned by Volkswagen of Germany.

Anglo-American and Oppenheimer pride themselves as liberal employers and to a certain degree they are more liberal than other South African companies. As soon as the strike began we received a request for assistance. In the case of a multinational [corporation] we used to pressure our country affiliates to help in a settlement. What do you do with a purely South African company and one that is a more liberal employer? We had made some personal contact with the Labor Relations Manager of Anglo-American. He always wanted to meet with us when he visited Geneva and the International Labor Organization. He always told us that Anglo-American was in favor of change.

I had the person in our office who was responsible for South Africa call the Labor Relations Manager and tell him the following: “If the company follows the practice of discharging all the strikers, we will start an international public relations campaign against Anglo-American. Every year the company places full page ads in the European papers claiming how liberal they treat their employees and how progressive they are in their labor relations. The IMF will tell the real story beginning with an ad in the Financial Times, a paper circulated all over the world.” The Labor Relations Manager told my assistant, “Mr. Rebhan can't do this!” To which my assistant replied, “You don't know him!” This worked. The negotiations began and no one was discharged. The strike was settled within a reasonable time.

The other case was Volkswagen (VW). The strike began and we were contacted. In turn we contacted Loderer, who was President of I. G. Metall and a member of the Supervisory Board of VW and they stalled. The hid behind South African legislation and the rules of the Employers' Association. As these talks were going on, we sent one of the Assistant General Secretaries of the IMF to South Africa, who was Swiss. The Swiss were not required to obtain visas for entry into South Africa. He became the advisor to the union and eventually the chief negotiator. Being also an economist he assisted in developing a cost of living system for the negotiations. Between the pressure of the strike and the intervention of the I. G. Metall, the results were a favorable settlement.

Let me mention the Wiehahn Commission. The Wiehahn Commission came, because the government finally realized that it had to give some legitimacy to trade unions, especially to black trade unions. Wiehahn was a professor of labor and a labor arbitrator.

Kienzle: This was initiated by the South African Government?

REBHAN: The South African Government.

Shea: Who was the Labor Attach# at that time.

REBHAN: Frank Golino. This was in the late 1970s. [Anyway], Wiehahn headed the commission and came up with a report. [As a result] the Government legalized black unions, and black unions started to rise at that point. We pushed to amalgamate all the black unions into one metal workers union. We got most of them into one union called the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Then we established a full time office with one our people there to administer the money and provide support and so on. It was a very mixed period because black workers finally felt that they could do something. We had a lot of strikes. [Employers] used to fire people, and there were all kinds of legal problems. South Africa is [modeled] on the Anglo-Saxon legal system.

Everything is handled by lawyers, so we had a lot of work and it was quite successful, but also a drain on our funds..

Kienzle: Did the IMF have training programs at that time?

REBHAN: Yes, we had training programs. We had all kinds of things. And then we did something which was very unusual. The American corporations withdrew from South Africa. That was both good and bad, because we had [exerted] quite a bit of pressure on American corporations from this end. [For example], when there was a Ford strike or something like that, we could do something. When [the Americans withdrew] they said, “We're not the managers anymore. We sold the company.” [Some of] the sales were maybe not completely [at arms length], but a lot were real sales. So that took away [some of our leverage].

But the Germans thought of something else. The Germans started putting pressure on German employers, who didn't want to withdraw from South Africa, and said, “You have to treat these workers just like you treat workers at home. If there's a strike, you can't fire everyone, or you are going to have trouble with us.” [This was especially true] at Volkswagen. They finally got a written agreement with the overwhelming majority of German employers setting out the conditions that would exist. This was a great, great achievement.

Kienzle: Was this unusual or were there other instances like this?

REBHAN: This was highly unusual. This was the only time, and it came towards the end of this period. It didn't last long enough to be able to really analyze it, but it was a great thing when it happened, and you really have to give the German [union] I. G. Metall credit for that. They really worked at it. The Germans sent down their main lawyer; they sent down people from their office; and they really put pressure on companies at home on this thing, Siemens and so on. That was great.

Kienzle: Was the AFL-CIO active in South Africa at this point and did you interact with their policies towards South Africa?

REBHAN: The AFL-CIO was having a problem. The AFL-CIO, I think, made a mistake. They gave the George Meany Award to Gatcha Buthelezi, and that soured the people [South African blacks] towards the AFL-CIO. People who had an ax to grind, the left-wingers and so on, used that and the AFL-CIO could do very little. Also other people gave money, the Swedes and the Dutch. South Africa was a cause celebre. The ICFTU [was involved]. There was always money for South Africa.

Kienzle: Can you explain why the AFL-CIO was so far off base on this decision [to recognize Buthelezi].

REBHAN: I don't know why, but Irving Brown had something to do with it. Irving knew Africa. He couldn't get a visa to South Africa. I don't know how that happened. At one time Buthelezi resisted having a homeland officially. Mandela was in jail at that time. So Buthelezi played a role, but it soured people to give the award to Buthelezi, because to them he was a homeland [supporter]. He headed a homeland and he ran it like a fiefdom.

Then in Latin America we did a lot, especially during the strikes in Brazil in the auto industry. Lula, Luis Ignacio da Silva, was our creation. At one time he was very good; later it went to his head.

Shea: He was a gutsy guy.

REBHAN: He was a gutsy guy. Absolutely! And he was a self-educated man.

Kienzle: What was the IMF program there?

REBHAN: We had seminars down there, but mainly we gave them financial support during strikes, because they really needed it. The unions existed in semi-legality. They got the

extra benefits of that system. They had a health [benefit] business, so the union members paid extra dues for that.

Shea: They had the imposto syndicato, the trade union tax. In Argentina, this was after Van Door was murdered.

REBHAN: The first time I went to Argentina, Vandor was still alive and I met with him. Vandor was murdered shortly after that. Speaking of Argentina, I once was a member of a delegation to Argentina to go talk to the government, to Videla, and to try to get some of the trade unionists out of jail.

Kienzle: This would have been during the same period roughly in the late 1970s?

REBHAN: Yes, in the late 1970s. When was the military government there?

Shea: They had a series of military governments. The first time was in 1966 when they threw out Arturo Illia and Juan Carlos Ongania came in.

REBHAN: We were down there at that time. Later Peron came back, but he didn't last very long, and he died. His wife took over, and there was anarchy. Then they threw her out, and the generals took over, and Videla was the leader of the generals at that time. Tony Freeman was the Labor Attach#. We went down there with the General Secretary of the ICFTU. We met with some of the union people, then with Videla in Videla's office.

Shea: Then you saw Lorenzo Miguel?

REBHAN: Yes, in jail. We went to see Videla. We were sitting across from him, and he had his crucifix hanging on the wall behind his back. He gave us a line of bull about anarchists and so on. Then finally I asked him whether I could see certain trade unionists who were in prison. He was taken aback by that and said, “Well, we'll let you know.”

[Later] we were having a press conference at the hotel, and there was a phone call. The caller said, “Mr. Rebhan, be at the local city airport at one or two o'clock, and we will go to the prison.” I got over there and there were soldiers all around with machine guns. I said to myself, “If any of these young kids drops one of these guns, he will kill you by mistake.” Finally, the General Secretary of ORIT at that time [arrived. He was] a Peruvian or Bolivian or something like that. A young kid. He didn't last long. He went with me, and the soldiers said, “Stay here, and an officer will get you. We'll take you by helicopter to the prison.”

So we took this military helicopter, which was wide open on all sides. This was one of those that they probably [used] to throw people out of. It had two pilots with side arms and an officer. We got on the plane and we rode about 15 minutes. I said to myself, “If somebody shoots at this helicopter, goodbye!” In the meantime, the union people took my luggage out to the airport in order not to waste time, because I had to leave that evening. We rode out into the countryside, and we landed at a big building; all the prisoners were at the windows of the jail, because a helicopter coming [means] either an important person or an important prisoner. The warden was standing there. He was nine feet tall. He saluted. The other fellow, who was with me, the General Secretary of ORIT, was also a little fellow. So we little fellows went into his office, and he called, “Soldier, bring coffee,” and [the soldier] brought coffee. Then like a typical jail warden, he showed us what the prisoners had made this for him, a coat hanger and so forth. Finally he said, “Well, we'll get the guys [you came to see].” The fellows came in. There were three of them there. Lorenzo Miguel was one of them, and there were two others from two other unions. I don't remember what unions they were. They looked pretty good. They were sun-tanned. They must have been outside in the yard, but they were so happy to see us, because somebody was paying attention to them. “How did you manage to get here?” “It was an accident you ever got here.” The [warden] left us alone and we talked to them for a while. We spent about 15 or 20 minutes with them. They thanked us profusely. They couldn't get over [the fact] that we had come to see them.

Shea: Did they say that they were well treated? REBHAN: They said that they were not tortured. After all, Lorenzo was a big wheel in the Peronist Party. They figured that “if he gets back in, he will pay us back.” Then the fellow who was with me wanted to see another prisoner, and they said he was in some other jail. We flew over to another jail, and the pilots didn't know where to land. There was a convent next door and all these nuns were out there waving their handkerchiefs. We landed at the jail and we talked to the [wardens]. They said, “This guy is not here. There is no such prisoner.” He was probably dead by then. Well, we took off again and I told the officer, “Look, why don't you talk to the airport by radio. I have to catch a plane to go back to Madrid and then on to Geneva, and my luggage is already out there.” He said, “Well, there is so much radio traffic now. I can't do it.” Finally, we get to the airport and we landed right in front of the plane. They got the luggage and my passport and ran in to stamp the passport. I got on the plane and all these people were giving me dirty looks, because we were probably a half hour or an hour late leaving. “Who is he?” That was quite an experience, and I felt pretty good about that.

The other [experience I want to mention involved the] General Secretary of the black Metal Workers Union in South Africa. He went to England on a study trip and like a fool — He may have been fingered by somebody in Britain. — he took back some anti-Apartheid literature. At the airport, they opened up his luggage, and they arrested him. Boy! That was really something! What we did was to immediately start a campaign to release him. We hired a lawyer from London, who was a member of the House of Lords from the Liberal Party, not from the Labor Party. We asked him to go down to South Africa for us to observe the trial. The trial was postponed. He went down there and luckily he knew the British Ambassador very well. He had gone to school with him. So he got entree to the prosecutor and all those people [involved in the case]. He made a good case for us, but the [black labor leader] still sat in jail. The trial didn't come up. Nobody was ever freed in South Africa in one of those cases. They always got sentenced to something. But we were sure that we had saved his life. They wouldn't kill him [even though] they would beat him up.

Then Christmas came around and we started a campaign. We printed up postcards in different languages wishing him a Merry Christmas and hoping that he would get out, and we mailed about 50,000 cards like that to him at the jail. He never received them, but they piled up. Kienzle: The jailers took notice anyway!

REBHAN: The jailers took notice. It was a good campaign. We publicized it and there was a committee in the United States for him. Finally, he was freed. He was one of the few unionists who ever got out of jail in South Africa without being sentenced. He is now a member of Parliament. Moses Mayakiso.

The other case [that I want to mention]. . . — and these are the things that gave me the greatest satisfaction, because I saw something achieved. — was a similar case in Tunisia. In Tunisia Ismael Sahani was the head of the Metal Workers Union. Bourguiba declared marshall law and the government arrested all the trade unionists including Sahbani, and they really tortured him. We started a campaign. We got a lawyer from Paris, France, to go down there as an observer, and we got people from our office to go down there. I wrote a letter to [President] Carter asking that he stop military assistance to Tunisia. I remember that Daniel Horowitz came to Geneva to give me the message that [the United States Government] was going to do something about this. Sahbani told me later when he got out that he had somehow gotten wind of this letter. He said, “Herman, when I heard that you wrote to Carter, I knew that I was going to come out.” We supported his family during that whole period when he was in jail.

Shea: I think Jesse Clear was there a Labor Attach#.

REBHAN: Yes, maybe. Later there was a woman Labor Attach# there.

Shea: Mary Ann Casey.

REBHAN: Yes, she spoke Arabic.

Shea: She became an ambassador.

REBHAN: She was there later. We got this guy out of jail and that was another one of those things that made me feel good.

In South Korea we did a lot of work. When the dictatorship ended in South Korea, there were enormous strikes. The workers really [became active]. We paid a lot of attention, and we put a lot of money into South Korea.

Shea: Herman, when did you take the Italians back?

REBHAN: Oh, the Italians! Let's talk about them. The Italians were a peculiar bunch of unionists to start with. First of all, they were for Benedict [during the election campaign for the IMF Secretary Generalship]. Then they wanted a special status in the IMF, because they were going to unify the three [labor unions/federations including] the Communists, and since we didn't accept Communists, it was a big issue. So they withdrew from the IMF.

Kienzle: Now which federations were in the IMF?

REBHAN: The Socialists and the Christian Democrats. The Communists, the FIOM (Federazione Italiana Operai Metal-Meccanici), were not. Then there was this business of “unification” in Italy that went on for all these years with the three confederations, but the metal workers were really very close to unity with the initials F.L.M.

Shea: They were engaged in joint collective bargaining.

REBHAN: Joint collective bargaining. It was a typical Italian jerry-built operation. They were unified, and they weren't unified. They still are that way. So they withdrew from the IMF. Some people said that we ought to give them special status. I said, “No. No. We have rules in the IMF. If they want to come back, they will have to accept the rules.” We had meetings with them from time to time about this. They went on, and they said, “We got

to have a 'special arrangement' outside the rules." I said, "No. No. That doesn't go." The Swedes wanted to give them special status and so on, and I said, "No." Then we let them come to some of our meetings, like the Central Committee meetings, but they had no vote. One day a guy from the Christians came [to me]. His name was Bentivoli. He was one of the General Secretaries of the F.L.M.. The Christians were worse than the CP actually on a lot of questions. The Communists had more finesse. They knew when not to raise issues like the PLO, and other things dealing with the Soviet Union and so on.

So one day we had a Central Committee meeting in Vienna, and Bentivoli said that he wanted to talk. I said, "Sure. After everybody else talks, you can talk." The first thing I did when the Italians withdrew was to eliminate the Italian translation. We were not going to have Italian translation if we didn't have any Italian speaking members. They immediately didn't like that. So he said, "Well, there's no Italian [translation]. I said, "I'll tell you what. We have somebody in the Secretariat who is a Swiss-Italian. You give [your statement] to her in Italian, and she will translate it into French and the interpreters will do it in French." So he did this, and this woman came to me and said, "Do you know what he wants to say, Herman?" I said, "No." [She replied], "He's criticizing the IMF on Spain." I said, "No. That doesn't go. This is our hall. This is our meeting. We paid for this hall. If he's a member, he can criticize the IMF all he wants, but if he's not member, he can't criticize the IMF [here]." This Italian got furious. He went to Loderer. I said, "No. That doesn't go. No matter if you have three million members or thirty members. If you are a member of the IMF, you can say anything you want. But if you are a guest, you are not going to insult us." He was going to criticize our policy in Spain, because they were dealing with the Christian unions at that time. They were horsing around, which later didn't amount to anything. I said, "No. No."

Finally, when we had the [IMF] congress in the United States in 1981, they joined, and they immediately wanted to get on the Executive Committee. I said, "No. No. You have to

wait a little bit to get on the Executive Committee." They got on the Executive Committee at the next congress. That was the Italians.

Kienzle: How did the AFL-CIO react to the Italians reentering the IMF?

REBHAN: I think it didn't amount to anything anymore, because the Italians came in under a unified thing. In the FLM, the Communist Party, Socialist were in. What's his name?

Shea: Ottaviano Del Turco.

Kienzle: The policy of excluding Communists was no longer applicable?

REBHAN: The policy of excluding Communists worked. We didn't take the CGT of France.

Kienzle: But Communists integrated into an umbrella organization [were acceptable]?

REBHAN: Yes, like the Austrians had a Communist faction. The Danes, too. You know, it's interesting. You mentioned the Communists. The Communist Metal Workers International always wanted to meet with us, and cooperate [vis a vis] the multinationals, and I said, "No. No." At the ILO at metal trades meetings we always gave them some vice presidency because of the Russians. So they kept bothering us, especially me and especially the Germans because of the Ostpolitik. Finally the President of the Finnish Metal Workers Union was having his 60th birthday and everybody was invited, and I was up there. So they maneuvered a meeting between the General Secretary of the Metal Workers International, who was a Frenchman from the CGT, and the President, who was an East German, and Loderer and myself and I guess somebody from Finland. The fellow from the Communist International, the WFTU, was talking about cooperation, solidarity, and multinationals. "We have a joint fight," and he goes on and on and on. This was shortly after the ILO annual meeting in Geneva. So I said, "This is very interesting what you are saying. There may be something to it, but it is very difficult for me to be prepared to cooperate with you. I have just attended the ILO annual conference in Geneva. During the

meeting of the Workers' Group, when the representative of Solidarnosc got up to speak, all the representatives of the WFTU affiliates walked out as a protest. If you people cannot tolerate a speech by a representative of the Polish workers, it makes it impossible for me to even discuss any cooperation or joint activities."

After this they couldn't answer. That was the end of the meeting.

I was also on the Executive Committee of the ICFTU, because the ITSs have representation there.

Kienzle: Would you describe the relationship between the ITSs and the ICFTU

REBHAN: There's a long history. The ITSs were at one time completely independent. During the big fight with the WFTU in 1947 and 1948, there was the question of merging the ITSs, the industrial unions, into the WFTU as departments. That was what basically started the split in the WFTU, besides the Marshall Plan and all the other things. So when the ICFTU was organized. . . — I forget what year it was. 1949? — there was an agreement signed between the ITSs, including the International Metalworkers Federation, and the ICFTU called the Milan Agreement, which [established] the independence of the ITSs but [pledged] ideological cooperation with the ICFTU. There was an arrangement that the ITSs would have four representatives on the ICFTU Executive Board. My relations with the ICFTU were very good. First of all, we were not dependent on ICFTU money, which makes for a pretty good relationship. The little ITSs, like the Food Workers and the others that depended on ICFTU money, had a little problem getting money out of the Solidarity Fund, etc.

Shea: Dan Gallin

REBHAN: Dan Gallin and so on. Also at one time everyone was against the Americans [AFL-CIO] having the [labor assistance] institutes. "You should all go through the ICFTU." Then all of the sudden, all the others had institutes. The Germans had the Friedrich Ebert

Stiftung. The Swedes had their foundation. (S.I.D.A.) The Danes had a foundation. The Dutch. They all had foundations, and they all operated separately. How things changed, but at one time that was the biggest schism that the Americans had committed: having the institutes and getting government money.

Kienzle: Did you work through the institutes at all with your assistance activities?

REBHAN: Very little, because we really didn't need it. At one time, we were financially in good shape. Not now, because of the unemployment in the metal industry. In the old days, the UAW used to put a lot of money into IMF. If you read some of the old IMF minutes, Victor [Reuther] would come to a meeting and say, “The UAW gives $200,000 for this project” and things like that.

Kienzle: Did the IMF work through the ICFTU at all in assistance activities?

REBHAN: We didn't need it really. The ICFTU took care of affiliates in the developing countries and a lot of these little [groups] like the plantation workers, the teachers unions, and ITSs of that nature.

Shea: Tom Bevin really was a. . .

REBHAN: Tom Bavin was a from the plantation workers.

Shea: Yes. Frank Lyons. . .

REBHAN: I don't remember him.

Kienzle: Was there much coordination among the International Trade Secretariats (ITSs)?

REBHAN: Yes, we used to meet. We called it an “ITS General Conference,” and we used to meet at least once a year. We would discuss things and exchange ideas and acted on items we could agree on.

Kienzle: What kinds of issues would you discuss?

REBHAN: The ITSs would report what each one was doing: Problems they had with foundations, money, and sometimes campaigns in various countries. They would ask our affiliates in various countries to cooperate and work with their affiliates and so on.

Kienzle: Did that work very well? How many joint campaigns were actually launched?

REBHAN: Not too many. Everybody has their own problems. It's hard. Then there are personality clashes a lot of times with these things, too.

Kienzle: Would there be joint efforts in a single country among the ITSs?

REBHAN: Yes. Mainly the meetings were more informational and also to have a general policy on the ICFTU maybe and things of that nature.

Kienzle: Was there ever any concerted effort to pressure, say, a single multinational corporation?

REBHAN: If there were some [special] relationships there between the [parties], we would do it.

[Referring to written notes], let me give you something on Mitbestimmung, the German system of co-determination. In 1976 or 1977 the German law was amended. First of all there were two systems; one was in coal and steel, which was really co-determination, because there was a fifty-fifty [parity between management and workers on the board]. Then the law was amended in 1976 and 1977, to change the composition of the Aufsichtsrat, the supervisory board. It became “ten and ten,” ten from management and ten from the employees, and among the ten from the employees, three had to be from the outside. That meant in most cases the union could determine who the three would be. The

Ford workers came to me and said, “Herman, since you know something about the auto industry, we want you to be on the Ford board.”

Kienzle: When was this?

REBHAN: This was in 1977 right after the Co-determination Law was passed. So I said, “Well, how does it work?” They said, “We have to elect you. You have to be a candidate.” So there were two ways of electing [someone] to this supervisory board. One was by having a secret ballot vote of all the people in the plant; [in the other] people vote for electors and they elect. At Ford they voted for electors. Ford had about 40,000 to 45,000 people employed in Germany. The company started saying, “What's this American doing on our board?” Henry Ford told me that the people in Dearborn were climbing up the wall. [They felt] they were being expropriated. So I became a candidate, and there were two other candidates, who wanted that job. One was from a white collar union and somebody else, because in Germany there is a separate white collar union. Anyway, the [Ford union people] said, “You are going to speak at one of our Betriebsversammlung, a meeting of all employees on company time. This meeting is held on the basis of the labor law.” So we held this meeting, and I spoke there. At the meeting of the electors, and I won the election.

At the first meeting of the board, I was elected to be a vice chairman of the board. What was interesting was that one of the [members], who is now president of Chrysler by the name of Lutz, was the Vice President of Ford in Europe at one time. He was an interesting guy. So at the first meeting [of the board, which was held] after a German stockholder meeting, we organized and the company was very reluctant to give us information. We had all kinds of troubles. Luckily the law also provided that the Arbeitsdirektor, which means the Personnel Manager, has to be elected by a two-thirds vote of the board, that is on the first vote; then on the second vote it is just a majority. What happened was that the personnel director, who was a very decent man died, and the company said, “No, we don't have to elect [the successor] through this [process].” We said, “Oh, yes. You have to elect through this [process].” So we had a big fight over the Arbeitsdirektor, and actually it was

more to show the company what authority we had, because we had a candidate, but we really didn't have a real candidate. So we went through the motions and [the story] got into the press. Ford in Germany didn't look very good. Then the company said, “Well, we are not going to have this circus anymore.” I was on TV, and the company was not very good at those things. Their PR guy was [used to] a one way street. He would tell everybody [Ford is producing] a new model and it's going to be great. He didn't have any of these arguments with radicals like myself. I knew all the tricks of the trade.

So after that, we cooperated. We got all kinds of information. The union people from the plant, who were sitting on that board, I have to give them credit. First of all, they were Ford workers. Most of them were skilled workers. Most of them went through an apprenticeship with Ford and they knew the company backwards and forwards. In addition to this, they played politics inside the company, one building manager against another one. For instance, the company wanted to move work some place else. Well, the manager of that building didn't want the work to go to England or to Spain or to the United States. So he would provide the Betriebsrat, people or the bargaining committee, with all kinds of information on how he could manage to produce cheaper or at the same price. Boy, the company was just climbing the walls! Where did they get all this information? And it was good information. In many cases it saved jobs. The jobs stayed in Germany.

Another thing which really impressed me was their knowledge. One other thing that impressed me greatly. There was an auto crisis in Germany in the 1980s, and they had to lay off [something on the order of] 14, 000 people. They negotiated for months on what kind of a severance pay they were going to get, and this committee negotiated a number of other layoff benefits. In the United States, the contract says “we are going to give 24 hour notice. You're out.” That was really impressive.

Kienzle: What about efficiency? Was there any greater efficiency as a result of the transparency?

REBHAN: Yes. The union and the workers cooperated on these matters. They knew their jobs, and they knew what it takes to do this, and the company cooperated on these things. Before [Ford] put out a new model, they really worked with the people in the plant to make sure that they did not have a bunch of lemons coming off the line.

Kienzle: How did the AFL-CIO view Mitbestimmung and your participation on the board?

REBHAN: They ignored it for the most part. Once in a while they had an article in their magazine, The Federationist, criticizing Mitbestimmung. They didn't know what they were talking about. Now everybody wants to cooperate. This was different. These unions were not patsies. I. G. Metall is not a patsy union. It's a class-conscious union. It's a militant union. They struck recently to maintain the 35 hour week.

There's the master or basic contract, but then there are conditions over and above that which each plant negotiates separately, and these workers have conditions [of employment] that you have never heard of.

Shea: What role did the Turkish workers play in the union or did they play any?

REBHAN: A very good question. There was an enormous number Turks working at Ford, especially in Cologne. If I remember, 3,000 in Cologne alone.

Shea: And also at Mercedes in Stuttgart.

REBHAN: Yes, in Stuttgart, too. The Turks played a very important role politically in the union. Everybody in the union catered to them politically. We had a Turk who was a member of the Aufsichtsrat who was a member of the bargaining committee. In some plants they have separate meetings for Turkish workers, because of the [need for language] interpretation. But in the Turkish group there were a lot of guys who had an outside ax to grind. On the Board of I. G. Metall there is a Turkish worker. I used to kid him. They used to say Chrysler gave the union some representation on the board which

they took away afterwards. The guys at Ford asked me, “How many [workers] do you have on the board?” I said, “One.” They laughed at me. Then I asked, “How many Turks do you have on your Executive Board?” [Laughter].

Kienzle: What kind of extraneous issues did the Turks try to interject at the local level?

REBHAN: The Turks had political parties. They didn't interject, but they recruited people [for] the political parties. Then Turks voted for Turks, just like blacks in our union vote for blacks.

Kienzle: There was a lot of concern at one time about the perks that might be offered to members of the board.

REBHAN: Oh, that's a good question and that's very interesting. First of all, Ford was smart. They paid very little. I originally got 6,000 marks, but because I was a vice chairman, I got 8,000 marks a year and a car. That was good, because that kept down graft. That was Ford's idea, and the union people agreed with that. Mercedes paid 40,000 or 50,000 marks but in the I. G. Metall you had to return everything to a the Mitbestimmungsstiftung (The Co-determination Foundation), and you actually kept very little. How did they enforce it? Every year they published [a list of] those that paid and those that didn't pay, and those that didn't pay, didn't get elected again. That made me feel good. At a certain time of the year I sent them a few thousand marks and forgot about it. There was no double income. They also had bankers and people like that on the board. But that [I. G. Metall policy] was very good. The union did that immediately. I know one fellow at Klockner-Deutz in Cologne, who was one of those smart alecks, who thought he would not give any money [to the Co-determination Foundation]; he didn't get reelected. And once a year they published a full page in the I. G. Metall paper of all the names [listed] alphabetically.

Shea: How about the Italian communists after [the merger]?

REBHAN: They were mild. They were pussycats. You know what they did? Galli was their representative. He was head of the unified metalworkers (F.L.M.) for a while, and he came to Executive Committee meetings. Sometimes either on the question of Israel or on the question of some cooperation or something, he would make a speech for the record, but he wouldn't argue. We integrated them; we assimilated them. They couldn't do much in a big organization like the IMF. I know this happened in the UAW when we finally merged many years later with the FE (Farm Equipment Workers Union). These members from FE came into the UAW and that was wonderful for the rank and file especially. It was a democratic union. You could do things. When the FE was run by the Communist Party. [members] couldn't raise their heads unless [it was sanctioned]. I had very few problems with the Italians. Among the Italians I had more problems with the Christians than I did with [the Communists]. [They Christians] were always out in left field. They had to be more radical than the others.

Shea: Yes, they had a left wing group, especially from Turin. They were much further to the left than the Communists there.

REBHAN: In Fiat the Communists had more [members] than the Christians.

Shea: My understanding was they were pussycats there too in Fiat.

REBHAN: Yes, Fiat was really a closed corporation.

Kienzle: Are there any more items from your [prepared] outline that you would like to highlight?

REBHAN: No, I think that's about it.

Kienzle: One final question. Do you have any comments about the U.S. Government's Labor Attach# Corps and its performance?

REBHAN: My experience with Labor Attach#s was always good. They knew the country [of assignment] and I never ran into one, even during the Reagan period and so on, who spewed the conservative line. The only time someone kind of embarrassed me was in Taiwan, and he was political officer, I think. He wasn't a Labor Attach#. I met with him, and he said, “Well, these are not your real unions. They are government unions. How do you explain that?” I said, “Wait. The time will come.” In Taiwan, we had an interesting [situation] in a way. Taiwan was a dictatorship really for many, many years. We had affiliates there. The Japanese worked slowly and quietly there. One time we had an Asian regional conference in Taipei. We checked before hand, because if everybody didn't get visas, we wouldn't hold the conference. We checked with our guys, who told us, “Look, there won't be any problem. The Israelis will get visas.” It came time for [the conference], and I got a phone call from the Histadrut. They couldn't get visas. Well, the Taiwanese didn't have representation in many of these countries, so you had to go to Lucerne, Switzerland, to get a visa. That's all right. We didn't care, but they gave us a run around. So two days before the conference I said to our Taiwanese, “You go and tell the Government that we are canceling the conference. Tell them also that when the ICFTU had a congress in Mexico and Mexico didn't want to give visas to the Taiwanese to come to the congress, I voted in the Executive Board to postpone the conference. I fought for you guys to get visas. I think I can [now] expect [visas for the Israelis].” Well, finally the Israelis got visas. They came a day late.

Shea: Was that Giladi?

REBHAN: Giladi. He was a nice man. He died.

Kienzle: He died about three years ago.

REBHAN: He had stomach cancer of some kind. So we had the opening of the conference and the Minister of Interior, who was in charge of labor like in all those countries, was going to speak to the conference in Taipei. I had a prepared text, which I gave to the

Chinese interpreter. I wrote out in longhand in English criticism about the visas. So the Chinese interpreter said to me, “Mr. Rebhan, you're not going to say this?” I said, “I'm going to say that absolutely. This is what happened.” He said, “You can't do this!” I said, “I can do this.” Then the Minister of Interior had to tell me, “No, there was a misunderstanding and everything is all right.”

I had a similar thing [happen] in Jamaica. Who was Prime Minister of Jamaica?

Shea: Edward Seaga.

REBHAN: Not Seaga. Before Seaga. He [Michael Manley] went through training in the Steelworkers Union. He was from the Bauxite Workers Union. He recently [declined to run for Prime Minister] because he has cancer. Anyway, he was the Prime Minister. We had a Latin American conference and the Prime Minister was going to come and the ambassadors were at the meeting, and in my speech. . . — They were horsing around with Castro at the time. The Cubans sent a lot of teachers and health officers to Jamaica at that period. — I criticized Jamaican policy and I said, “If Pinochet sent troops to South Africa to defend South Africa like Castro sends, what would you say?” The Prime Minister got furious at that. He had to answer me in his speech, and the next day the opposition paper published my whole speech.

Kienzle: Are there any other stories you would like to get on the record for us?

REBHAN: I can't think of all the other stories [right now]. I'll probably think about them after you leave.

Kienzle: You always have an opportunity to add to the transcript later on.

REBHAN: Is that enough for you?

Kienzle: Thank you very much for your interview, which is a very fine addition to both the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project and the Trade Union Retirees Oral History Project.

REBHAN: I loved the work in the UAW. It wasn't a question of salary. The salary was good compared to what I made in the shop. Coming to this country gave me a real opportunity to do things.

Shea: Did you learn any English at all in Germany as a student?

REBHAN: Yes, in high school. You know how much that is. But when I went to Cleveland, my relatives who brought us over said, “The first thing you have to do is to enroll in night school and file for first papers.”

Kienzle: How much formal education did you have besides high school?

REBHAN: When I was at Electromotive at General Motors, I got a Ford Foundation scholarship from the Fund for the Republic at the University of Chicago. It was a part time deal and was for trade union work and all. We had Halberson, who was a Professor of Labor Relations. One day he went around the room and wanted to know whether we could define collective bargaining. I was one of the last ones [to speak] and I told him, “Collective bargaining is when you take the boss and you hold him upside down and you see how much money comes out of his pockets.”

Kienzle: What did he say?

REBHAN: He laughed. That's about the only education I got. But I learned English very quickly. When I came here, I was sort of a Social Democrat. I had been in a Zionist-Socialist organization, etc. So when I came here I went to the Cleveland Public Library, which had a big section of German books. That was like water for a man who was in the desert. I read all those books that were prohibited in Germany. That was great stuff. Stuff

on Zweig and Reiner Rielke and all the authors. Then I learned English pretty quickly, and I lost my accent very quickly.

Shea: In contrast to Henry Kissinger.

REBHAN: Yes, I'll tell you something about Kissinger later. I remember the first time I went to work. I was always interested in politics and things like that, so I bought the Cleveland Plain Dealer, which was the morning paper. I got on a street car. . . — I didn't have a car. — and I was going to work. I opened the paper. In Germany most of the papers are tabloids. I opened this full sized paper, and I didn't know how to fold it. It opened up all over the place, and I was so embarrassed. I remember I was reading about a Cleveland Indians baseball game, and I thought that real Indians played that game. What kind of a game with a stick?

Kienzle: Were you active at all politically in Germany before you came to America?

REBHAN: Only in the Zionist organizations.

Kienzle: You were not active in the Red Falcons or anything of that sort?

REBHAN: No. I was 13 years old when Hitler came to power.

Kienzle: Was your family active politically?

REBHAN: No. In the Zionist organization, you have a right, left, and center. I was in the left group, Hatzair. By the end when I left them, they were sort of Stalinist.

Shea: Did you ever meet [Mayor of Jerusalem] Teddy Kollek in Israel?

REBHAN: Yes.

This [story] is very interesting. [My wife] Dorothy and I went to a movie in Chicago right after the war. They showed the newsreels in those days, and the newsreels came on, and

there was [a report on former] concentration camp prisoners at a Memorial. This went on, and there was a man standing there, and I got all excited and said to Dorothy, “This man used to live upstairs from us in Cologne.” She said, “Sit down!” We stayed there and we saw it again, and yes. My brother went down to see it; my father went down to see it. Yes, that's the man. And we knew that this man had two boys, who were brought to the United States by some Jewish organization. They had been friends of my younger brother. I went down to the Jewish organization in Chicago, and they started tracing them. They found that one of the boys was killed in the army in training in the United States, and that the other boy was still a soldier some place. Finally they got in touch with [the surviving son] and he got in touch with his father. His father had tuberculosis, and with tuberculosis you cannot come to the United States. It's a small world. The son's wife worked as a secretary in the UAW office, and through the UAW — and I don't remember who the Senator was at that time. He was a Senator who died. He was just on a temporary appointment or something like that. — Congress passed a special law and about two years later I saw this man. That was an incredible experience.

Mrs. Rebhan: I heard you mention that you went to night school to learn English.

REBHAN: I told them that we met at night school.

Mrs. Rebhan: We met in night school. We were both learning English.

Shea: Were you from Germany, too?

Mrs. Rebhan: He was from Germany. I was from Poland.

Shea: Where abouts in Poland?

Mrs. Rebhan: It was called Suwalki near Grodno and Bialystok. It was near the Lithuanian and Russian borders.

REBHAN: Do you want to hear something funny? In that book that I gave you, the wife of Earl Browder, who was General Secretary of the Communist Party, U.S.A., comes from her city. The world is really small. And I'll tell you another story. A similar thing. I was active in the IMF and went very often to Frankfurt to I. G. Metall. One day I saw in the I. G. Metall paper that there was a fellow who was editor of the paper named Moneta. We had some neighbors and distant relatives in Cologne by that name. So I asked the head of the International Department to introduce me to this fellow. It bothered me — that name. We went to his office. He looked at me. I didn't recognize him. He said, “I know you from somewhere, but I can't place you.” We started talking. He was the leader of the group in that Zionist organization that I [had been a member of]. He was older than I was. He went to Israel in 1933 or 1934, right at the beginning of Hitler, and in Israel he went to a kibbutz and worked in the kibbutz. Then he became a Trotskyite, and he was arrested by the British and put in jail during the war. He came back to Germany after the war, and he became the German Labor Attach# in Paris. Then I. G. Metall hired him. He knew Otto Brenner from before the war. They were both members of the SAP (Sozialistische Arbeiter Partei or Socialist Workers Party) in Germany, which was a splinter group from the Social Democratic Party. Willy Brandt belonged to that party. Moneta then became editor of the paper. What a small world!

Kienzle: Did you ever think at that time of immigrating to Israel?

REBHAN: We thought about it, because immigrating to the United States was difficult. I remember we nearly didn't make it [to the United States]. We got the visas in 1938. We had relatives in New Jersey and in Cleveland that “guaranteed” us and all that rigmarole. We went to Stuttgart, where the American Consulate was [located], just before [the] Munich [Agreement]. When Munich came, everything stopped. There was going to be a war. After Munich we had to start all over again, getting on a boat, etc., etc.

Kienzle: When was Munich?

REBHAN: Munich was in September 1938. Then we immigrated in October. We nearly didn't make it.

One thing I didn't mention was Solidarnosc. When Solidarnosc started, we [at the IMF] poured a lot of money into Solidarnosc.

Kienzle: What were the channels for that?

REBHAN: The channels were through Brussels mostly, because Solidarnosc had an office in Brussels, and Solidarnosc itself had connections. For instance, we gave them an IBM typesetting machine, and they smuggled it into Poland. Six months later we got a message. “It's a wonderful typesetting machine, but it's all worn out. We need a new one.” So we paid for the typesetting machine, then later we got a message that the typesetting machine was delivered.

Kienzle: How were they smuggled in?

REBHAN: They were smuggled in through the ports, because Solidarnosc had people at the customs [offices]. They were also smuggled in by truck. One ICFTU or AFL-CIO truck was caught with a lot of material. Before we came back [to the United States], Dorothy wanted to go and see the little town where she was born, so we were in Poland and we stopped at Solidarnosc. I was already retired, but I got a big hello.

Kienzle: When did you retire?

REBHAN: It was in 1989. Then I came back [to the United States] in 1990.

Kienzle: You've spent your retirement here?

REBHAN: We have a daughter here and two grandchildren, and we have a son here who just got married. We had a good life in Geneva. We can't complain.

Kienzle: Any final questions, Jim?

Shea: I'll think of them about two o'clock in the morning.

Kienzle: We want to thank you, Herman, very much for this fascinating interview. We appreciate your letting us do it.

REBHAN: I came here with some Social Democratic-Socialist ideas, and I could utilize them in the trade union movement. This is what is great about this country. In no other country could a foreigner like myself do these things. It's only in the United States that Kissinger with an accent like his could become Secretary of State.

Kienzle: That reminds me. You wanted to tell us a Kissinger story. We have to get that on the record.

REBHAN: When I came back here, I worked in the Washington office. One day I got a call from Reuther's office, and he said, “Herman, go to the White House. There's going to be a meeting with Clark Kerr, the President of the University of California, and a committee on Vietnam, and you represent the UAW.” Of course at the White House there was all this rigmarole of checking in and checking through. We went to the “situation room” and Kissinger came in. It was a meeting with Kissinger. Kissinger at that time would never allow his language to be recorded on TV or anything. A picture was taken, but at the beginning he never spoke. So Kissinger came in, and he started talking with this heavy German accent. I said to myself, “I'm not going to have an inferiority complex anymore. If this guy can be National Security Advisor, you know, I have a better accent than him.”

Shea: Did you speak to him in German?

REBHAN: No. No. We had a meeting and talked about Vietnam. He gave us the usual line at that time. Nixon's line.

Kienzle: What was the line?

REBHAN: The line was that we had to continue. We couldn't withdraw at that point. The regular Nixon line at that time. A few years later I went to a birthday party some place and there were some people there who were originally from Germany. They asked where I was from and all the usual talk, and they said, “But you don't have any accent.” I said, “ If I had an accent, I would be Secretary of State.” [Laughter}

Kienzle: On that note, we will close. Thank you very much, Herman, for the interview.

End of interview